30 days to first decision

Time span in Library Hi Tech from submission to first decision

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30 days to first decision: Time span in Library Hi Tech from submission to first decision

A highlight in researchers' life is the second they can hit the button "submit manuscript". It is the last step of having collected and analyzed data and having put everything together in an article. And then researchers wait. And wait. And wait. In the worst cases researchers have to wait years before they get a response, much less having the article published (Hutter, 2000). *Library Hi Tech* is proud that it requires on average less than 30 days from submission to a first decision on a manuscript. This editorial describes why this is a vital feature of *Library Hi Tech* and how (potential) authors can speed up the reviewing time for their article.

Timeliness is important for the editors of *Library Hi Tech*. Articles within *Library Hi Tech* deal with current technology developments and long publication spans go against the very idea of *Library Hi Tech*. Between September 2011 and September 2012, the average time span from submission to first decision was under 30 days. Of course, there are also negative examples. *Library Hi Tech* has had manuscripts in the process that took more than 90 days. This situation was usually due to reviews, where the editors were – in such cases – forced to add a third reviewer after the usual two reviewers disagreed substantially.

What makes the publication span be so long? The publication process can be divided into three distinct time spans: the first one is the amount of days or months editors need to make a first decision on a manuscript. Three to six months for the first notice is not unusual in most journals (Hodges et al., 2012).

The second time span is for revisions. If the manuscript does not receive an immediate acceptance, then the revision time needs to be added to the publication process. Within Emerald journals, authors usually get two weeks for a minor revision and three weeks for a major revision. *Library Hi Tech* tries to give a revised manuscript back to the same reviewers, which usually speeds the whole process up. This procedure also avoids the danger that a new reviewer will judge the revised version completely different than the first reviewers.

The last time span in the publication process is the time to publication. This is the period from submitting the final version to the appearance in a journal. Hutter (2000) collected information about this time span in computer science based on personal and colleagues' experiences, and he reports that this last time span can take another five to twelve months. *Library Hi Tech* publishes four issues per year and usually articles are published in the upcoming or the following issue.

Depending on when a manuscript receives an acceptance, this can be up to six months in the worst case. Usually it takes about two months for an article to be published in its original format as part of EarlyCite and another month to appear in the final print format.

Researchers are constantly under pressure to show their current research record to employers and colleagues, and having to wait for a decision on a manuscript is a loss of time – especially if the manuscript gets rejected because of reasons should have been obvious after a first glance. Many journals have therefore adapted a more rigid selection process, in which the editors decide which manuscripts will enter the reviewing process, and which manuscripts they will reject immediately. This is also true for *Library Hi Tech*. In the last year, the editors of this journal have rejected 28% of the submissions without sending them out to review. The reasons for this high rejection rate are various. However, most rejections could have been avoided if authors had followed a few rules.

The first rule seems to be obvious: a double blind peer reviewing system requires that all author information needs to be deleted before a paper can be send out to review. These can be explicit references to earlier work(s) of the author(s), but also the author information on top of the article.

The second rule for submissions is that the submissions must fit within the scope of the journal. *Library Hi Tech* publishes articles that deal in a very broad sense with technology in the information environment and in a narrower sense with technology developments in libraries or related cultural institutions. Articles need to describe new technology developments in these areas and should present original research. For example, a pure description of a new digital library, which has no novel or particularly innovative features, risks immediate rejection. Our sister journal *Library Hi Tech News* would be a more appropriate venue for this kind of paper.

The third rule for submissions concerns the findings of the research. A manuscript needs to be appropriate for the journal's scope and fit the readers' interests. Readers of *Library Hi Tech* want to know why they should care about the developments in a particular library or in a particular country. Sometimes readers from Europe or North America do not understand why they should care about survey results about librarians' perception of social software in – for example – India. Authors need to explain why such results matter to readers worldwide, and what readers can learn from their research. Without doubt, all submissions to Library Hi Tech need to explain why their article is of general interest, regardless of the country involved. The explanation that readers need to know what happens in a country like India (or the US or the UK) is not a sufficient explanation.

The fourth rule states that submissions need to be original works. By default the editors of *Library Hi Tech* check all manuscripts using copying detection software. *Library Hi Tech* does not accept articles with significant copying problems that could imply plagiarism, and the editors reject manuscripts immediately if submissions contain too large an overlap with other works or with a previously published work by the same author. Since the detection tools are not always reliable, authors always get a chance to explain and potentially to resubmit their manuscript.

The last rule to make a submission pass the editors' scrutiny is to follow the standards for scholarly research. Authors need to explain which methods they used, and what the research design looked like. A simple sentence stating that a survey instrument was used to collect data is not sufficient. Was it an online or a paper survey, did it contain only closed or also open ended questions, how was it distributed, how were participants recruited and how long was the collection time are only a few of the regular questions that come from reviewers. By offering these details immediately, authors can save time and avoid an immediate reject or a rejection after the reviewing process. Standards for scholarly research include also the expectation that manuscripts provide a literature review that explains the scholarly basis for the research and describes the state of the art in published sources.

All five rules would seem to be self-explanatory, but the submissions to *Library Hi Tech* as well as to other journals show that they are not. If authors stick to these rules, their chances of getting through the reviewing process faster and getting their own research published are fairly good.

Finally, a longer reviewing process is not always a bad thing. A good review might take longer, because a reviewer thinks that the content is worthwhile and will spend a considerable amount of time on the manuscript to improve it. An improved paper will serve the author better in the long run than a bad paper that was published quickly, and a quick review that was badly done could lead to erroneous editorial decisions. Library Hi Tech is committed to speedy reviews, but also to high quality ones that help the authors and give the readers the best possible research to read.

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